



Holiday Potluck Success

Potluck dinners can be fun or they can be hazardous to your health. At a potluck, food is often prepared hours before the event, not stored at the proper temperature and handled by many people . . . people who spread germs through their hands, hair, coughing or sneezing. The result? Possible food poisoning. Prevent foodborne illness by following these rules:

**Keep hot food *HOT!* Keep cold food *COLD!*
Keep food *CLEAN!***

- ✓ Cook foods thoroughly.
- ✓ Avoid serving low-acid foods, such as creamed dishes, meatballs, beef stew, fish dishes, chicken a la king or cream-filled pies/pastries.
- ✓ Reduce time between preparing, cooking and serving foods. Prepare food the same day as the potluck, if possible, only a few hours before serving. If foods have eggs, dairy products, meat or poultry, they should be served within three hours of preparation.
- ✓ Refrigerate food in small quantities using shallow pans if you must store food overnight.
- ✓ Keep hot food HOT (above 135° F) and cold food COLD (below 41° F) before and during serving. Use a barbecue, Coleman stove or sterno to keep food HOT. Use cold packs or ice to keep food COLD.
- ✓ Use disposable forks, knives, spoons, glasses and plates. Throw disposables away — do not try to wash them! Try to set up the forks, knives and spoons so the guests can pick them up by the handle.
- ✓ Line garbage containers with plastic bags to make throwing out the trash easier.
- ✓ Keep menu simple; avoid fancy food combinations.
- ✓ Do not use any home-canned foods. Home-frozen foods are acceptable.
- ✓ Sugar or sweeteners should be served in closed containers or single packets. Use only squeeze or pump bottles for ketchup or mustard, and individual packets for relish, mayonnaise, etc.
- ✓ When possible, use chilled ingredients to prepare foods that will be served cold.
- ✓ Cover food to prevent contamination by insects, flies, dust or humans.
- ✓ Foods safe to prepare at home include fruit pies, bread products, plain cakes, fruit salads, and tossed vegetable salads, including cole slaw with lemon juice/vinegar based dressing. Punches, fruit juices and similar beverages are safe if kept in glass or plastic containers. Do not use aluminum containers, which could release metals into foods.
- ✓ Throw leftovers away. The food has been handled by many people and is probably contaminated.



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Revised March 2004